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THE IDEAL TEACHER, ME! HOW CAN AN ITE PROGRAMME SUPPORT THE MOTIVATION OF TEACHER TRAINEES AND INFLUENCE THEIR PERFORMANCE?

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Abstract
This study intended to reveal the sources of motivation for study and the attitudes on career that teacher trainees have as they enrol on ITE courses and they complete them successfully, in order to identify means of action towards better performance during the programme. For teacher trainees, motivation can precede the classroom situation, or it can be engaged by it. The study was carried out with 80 participants and used both qualitative and quantitative instruments. In this article we present a part of the findings resulting from the comparative analysis of two reflective essays and discuss further action that can be taken to support performance.
Keywords: ITE; motivation; mental picture; learning to teach.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature abounds in studies showing the direct connection between individuals' motivation for study, as the process of initiating, sustaining and directing activity, and their learning performance. In general, one's affect towards a particular thing, action, situation or experience represents the way that thing, that action, that situation or that experience fits in with one's needs or purposes, and its resulting effect on one's emotions, or affective variables such as motivation and attitude. In the case of ITE, motivation can precede the classroom situation, or it can be engaged by it. The teacher trainee can have strong reasons for wanting to learn before he or she ever comes to the classroom. It became clear for us that teacher trainees are inspired by family models or their former teachers in kindergarten or primary school during the entry interview selection of applicants to the programme. In the course of attending a class strong reasons for continuing to attend and learn can emerge. In other words, learning breeds its own motivation and at the same time previous motivation can lead to success. Learners with positive learning experiences are more willing to engage with future ones, more confident in their chances of succeeding, and more likely to persevere in their efforts.

The goals of teacher training also include changing trainees' attitudes towards teaching. At the same time the attitude of trainees toward the profession, the learning situation and the roles they are expected to play in the classroom have an important effect on the learning process. Attitudes are not innate, but culturally and socially acquired. Although they can be modified by experience and reflection, they tend to be deep-rooted and persistent. Attitude is related to motivation. Learners' motivation may be determined by their attitude toward teaching and learning environment.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Improvements in teacher education need to be based on a well-founded understanding of teachers' professional development. Research on teacher learning (Day et al. 2007) identifies factors that are influential in the trainees' professional growth, an understanding of how the experiences of trainees relate to their developing practice. This study intended to reveal the motivation for study and the attitudes on career that teacher trainees have as they enrol on ITE courses and they complete them successfully, in order to identify means of action towards better performance during the programme. It was designed as a longitudinal research that could inform tutors on their course design.

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It can be argued that a psychologist perspective on learning development recognises as crucial in the success of learning anything that learners themselves bring to the learning situation. Learning for teaching becomes a matter of how trainees interact with what it is learned in the particular situation of the ITE programme (Bullough, 2001).

It is also important to consider how student teachers view of themselves as persons and as teachers (Day et al., 2007). It is suggested that a teacher trainee's experiences as a learner and the quality of the relationships experienced in educational contexts, determine the impact any course might have and further practice (Flores and Day, 2006).

It is increasingly evident from the literature (Hargreaves, 2005; Day et al. 2007) that personal experiences with teaching influence the process of learning to teach. Woods et al (1997: 152) argue that 'teaching is a matter of values. People teach because they believe in something'. Teachers may feel passionate about teaching, their own professional knowledge and skills and relationships with colleagues, or may not, because teaching is an emotional practice (Hargreaves, 2005).

It is very likely that teacher students with a wide variety of experiences and backgrounds would require quite different things from the teacher education programmes and have a variety of learning needs and dispositions that they take with them into their teacher education courses. For teacher education it means that they need to provide different participatory experiences, types and amounts of feedback and support during their training (Lucas, 2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study intended to reveal the sources of motivation for study and the attitudes on career that teacher trainees have as they enrol on ITE courses and they complete them successfully, in order to identify means of action towards better performance during the programme. Due to this purpose, it was considered that most relevant data could be revealed when using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. There were 80 participants, teacher trainees in their first undergraduate year. They were asked to write a reflective essay related to the mental picture of the ideal teacher before they came in contact with any speciality course. There followed an open-ended questionnaire on decision to select profession and the ITE programme to reach this objective, personal qualities held to become a teacher, expectations of the courses to be attended. Other three closed questionnaires on student values, learning and teaching styles were applied during the first term. Before concluding their first term courses they were asked to write another reflective essay on how they see themselves in a teacher position after attending their first training. Data was coded and analysed by four independent researchers for reasons of validity and reliability.

For the purpose of this article there were used 18 initial and 18 final essay written by the same participants. The decision to use data from the same participants was made for comparison reasons of contrasting analysis that could reveal a hypothetical evolution.

There were identified the following categories of responses:

Table 1.

Initial essay	Examples	Final essay	Examples
Personal qualities: patient, reliable, empathic, emotional stability, happy, sense of humour, energetic, creative	"Being self-confident" "Communicates with children trying to understand their problems" "Knows how to create and maintain a pleasant and relaxing learning climate"	Personal qualities: calm, creative, open, patient,	"I'm more self-confident" "I need to be calm and flexible"
Professional qualities: capable, prepared, motivated, able to motivate, good pedagogue, good psychologist, self-reflective	"Good the content knowledge" "Knows how to motivate children to learn" "Capable of self-analysis, able to make others reflect on their activity"	Professional qualities	"Observation practice helped me most" "I can control my emotions better to concentrate on tasks"
Untouchable goal	"Teacher learning never ends"	Becoming a teacher	"I understand now the complexity of learning to teach"
Love of profession	"Loves children" "Loves teaching"	Follow my dream	"I have the confirmation now that I made the right choice" "It's like a positive forecast for the next three years"
Communication skills	"Builds relationships" "Knows how to communicate	Communication skills	"I need to communicate efficiently with my pupils

	with the families" "Make children like them"		and their parents"
Development oriented	"Seeks development" "Seeks modernity, innovation"	Development oriented	"There is more to learn" "What I learn now will become reflex through practice"
Model, mentor	"Offers models" "Guides"	Need for models	"I always keep in mind my teachers' model"

Due to the research problem formulated in this article the qualitative approach was regarded as the most appropriate. As researchers were interested in improving a specific ITE programme and less in generalizing the findings, it was considered that this qualitative inquiry is context-specific. We emphasize the importance of the subjective experience of individuals and we understand that qualitative research becomes vulnerable to critics because of the multiple connotations of the notion. At the same time, we believe that 'subjectivity' here can be related to the 'contextual', if we consider that experience is shaped in the context and it cannot be understood adequately in isolation. We regarded the period of time between the two essays to be an advantage. This is because the system of values and attitudes toward "being a teacher" was already formed when they enroled the ITE programme and this gave us the opportunity to put this values system against the first semester assambly of disciplines and to let them experience directly along with their mentors what it is like being a teacher (within the limits of the 1st semester expectations). Another related aspect of the qualitative approach is 'inductive reasoning' which is based on the idea of understanding the general through individual parts, in other words it starts with the formation of a hypotheses that is open and unstructured (Bryman 2004). Thus, the issues of research design are not predetermined, but open to interpretation and alteration. From this perspective other issues can emerge from the data. The main purpose of this qualitative research is the discovery or uncovering of propositions (Cohen et al, 2005).

4. FINDINGS

Every year ITE programmes enrol enthusiastic students that dream to become 'their ideal teacher', having in mind the picture of the individuals that inspired them over the school years. It is interesting to notice that these models stand out primarily due to their personal and interpersonal qualities and only the because of their professional competences.

In the reflective essay participants to the study were asked to write in their first week in the programme, student trainees speak about the important role of mentor, guide, model that the TEACHER has in forming life values and attitudes in pupils. A passionate person, enthusiastic about his/her profession, inclined to lifelong learning and self-education. Moreover, the TEACHER has great interpersonal skills, a close and genuine interest in pupils' life and concerns, he/she is positive, generous, kind, patient and caring showing empathy to his/her pupils, showing availability and creativity.

When it comes to the professional competences, the term used is that of 'educated' explained as good pedagogue and psychologist, able to motivate, to inspire and encourage his/her pupils. It is a very interesting perspective that novice to these programmes offer every year on the relevant aspects of the expected/perceived professional outcomes. On the one hand they refer to the personal qualities of teachers as prevailing over others, on the other hand when asked about their expectations of the courses they refer to pedagogical and psychology knowledge and competences that teachers should use in practice. An explanation could be the fact that the emotional factors that impact on students' performance during the school years are more striking and are allocated a greater importance. Moreover, pedagogical strategies and methods are not so easily observable by untrained subjects of these. It is to notice that the descriptions they made were complex and focused more on social competences and human qualities; there is no awareness of methodological or administrative aspects of being a teacher. Moreover, we suspect that it is easier to notice aspects that you were made aware of than looking in the background. Another important aspect is related to the complexity of portraits they described. As there was a limitation to one page for the essays, they tended to condense the information and enumerate categories or aspects of teaching and teacher qualities, as if there was a need to express more. For us as researchers and course tutors this means that that there is more room for introspection and self-analysis. This could be a great foundation for further relevant research.

Once they apply for a training programme they become more aware of that their training would involve, but still they cannot picture the whole process yet. By the end of the first term their understanding of the process starts to deepen. They can affirm they 'can UNDERSTAND the importance of ….', without being able actually to say they 'KNOW how to do/apply in practice…'. It is a process of becoming aware of the roles, responsibilities, implications, knowledge, skills and competences involved in teaching and learning to teach. It

can be overwhelming for some as they had considered mostly the personal traits of character and personality that the TEACHER should have. Now they discover that there is more to it, that the whole training process is more complex and the study effort is higher. It is also true that their willingness to try new things, along with their motivation to learn without being afraid of wrong answers or failure are important ingredients to a successful recipe.

The training experiences in the first term come as a confirmation of the right decision they made to choose this profession. Motivation is very important for the way they approach courses. Most of the students apply for the ITE because they like children or working with children- as the entry interviews revealed. The theoretical framework offered during the first courses confirmed by the practice of observation these students do is used to strengthen their study efforts. It determines them to keep their enthusiasm, their endeavour to study, to become the "ideal me" as they confessed in their reflexive essays from the end of the term. Moreover, they add new models to the ones already existing in their individual gallery of teachers they admire, namely teachers from the ITE they start looking up to, this time more for professional skills and competences. This happens possibly because they have at hand new tools for critical analysis in terms of pedagogical knowledge and practical teaching knowledge coming from observation, that they start applying to all teaching situations they witness, including their training courses. In this way they could easily find a link between the accademic knowledge and practice.

They discovered a warm enthusiastic context, confirming the choice made and offering the theoretical knowledge that gives meaning to what it is observed in class. For most of them this is a "favourable forecast" for the following three years of the programme. Most of them perceive the activity of observation practice and the courses as a considerable effort but not a difficulty due to their motivation.

It seems that the recipe for success at the beginning of the training consists more of confirmations of personal understanding of teaching and picture of ideal teacher, rather than the selection of courses itself. It's the ''chemistry'' that is important, the students feeling comfortable in the study context, the intrinsic motivation, the feeling they ''follow their dream''. The difficulty will consist of changing incremented practices and attitudes towards teaching according to new philosophies of education and teaching strategies and methods that the programme intends to promote.

We could say that this is the first contact between their system of values and attitudes acording to their "being a teacher" picture on the one hand and the academic requirements and higher levels of knowledge, understanding and pedagogical attitudes on the other hand. It as not a nice, comfortable and easy contact. It brings about doubt and more questions that guide and shape the trainee in order to keep him/her motivated for learning, but more realistic and closer to a trained professional.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The discussions on teacher education usually revolve round the idea of the motivation and the quality of the training and training staff. Efforts are made in the direction of ensuring best study conditions, best educators and effective training for best practice. ITE education strives to comply with quality standards and find solutions to respond to student trainees' needs in order to improve their performance. Educators recognize the important role that student's motivation play in the way they perceive and embrace training. It seems that it is not all.

For many years, ITE programmes enrolled already motivated and determined individuals, young people that believed they had a vocation for the teaching profession. They were intrinsically motivated to study to become best professional, holding a mental picture of the ideal teacher they wanted to become. Nowadays, new generations of students look for a confirmation of their career choices, for a warmer and more flexible education form that shares the same values and attitude towards teaching. The ideal teacher is endowed with numerous personal qualities such as empathy, warmth, openness, goodness, justness. This idea might have its roots in a real need of the student for a teacher more prepared for interpersonal relationships. It is obvious that there is a gap in between ITE philosophies: there is no more enough to give teenagers receipies how to handle and what to do in class or kindergaden along with methodologies; from the nowadays theacher there are more expectations and it is required a greater professional maturity and a capacity to work with a wider area of difficulties (that child "borrows" from family and the new society we are living in); the inner structure of the padagogy is changeing in considering the child, the process and the outcome; the teacher cannot be the same and fulfill the same area of roles.

It has become clearer that ITE programmes need to take measures to stimulate their students' motivation throughout their studies in order to support their performance. Results of this research study were intended to inform course tutors on action to be taken for sustaining teacher trainees' performance during ITE. There was a general positive perception of the programme, the enthusiastic approach of the courses, the course tutors that

became in turn models for their students. This came as a confirmation, for the educators this time, that the warm climate and the way theory combined with practice during the first training experiences responded to teacher trainees' expectations.

Further data resulting from the other instruments applied within the study, namely the three closed questionnaires on student values, learning and teaching styles, will assist course tutors in designing courses in the future in order to maintain the premises for intrinsically motivated performance.

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